



**Tourism Education in France and Sustainable Development
Goal 4 (Quality Education)**

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Tourism Education in France and Sustainable Development Goal

4 (Quality Education)

Purpose - Research focuses on the phenomenon of “over-education” whereby there was a considerable discrepancy between education provided and the needs of the economy vis-à-vis employment with particular scrutiny on tourism and courses taught in the field. The phenomenon of over-education is to be investigated in terms of university graduates in tourism and their employability in the sector.

Design/methodology/approach – The research design draws from secondary data derived from a review of the literature on tourism and education.

Findings – The findings point towards the need of considering both aspects of tourism (field of study and discipline) in destination management. This is required in order to avoid any form of discrepancy at a macro or a micro level or at discipline or industry level. This strategy also ensures a synergy between tourism education and the needs of the tourism industry as advocated by the Helix model.

Originality/value – By focusing on over-education, this study shows that SDG 4, which relates to quality education, may be addressed. The outcome of the study also leads to the conclusion that SDG4 should not only be based on access to education and school enrolment rates at all levels, particularly for girls, but also on the relationship between education and actual employment.

Keywords – Over-education; Tourism; France; Sustainability; Destination performance

Paper type - Article

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1. Introduction

Research conducted by Jaoul-Grammare and Guironnet (2009) between 1980 to 2002, highlighted the existence of a phenomenon called “over-education” in France, whereby there was a considerable discrepancy between education provided and the needs of the economy vis-à-vis employment. Since almost thirty years, France has been the world’s leading tourism destination (Seraphin, 2012). In 2017, it received 86.9 million visitors for a total income of 53.7 billion euros (French Ministry of Economy and Finance, 2018). Among the seminal dates that helped establish France as a leading destination, the creation of the first National Tourism Office in 1910, the awarding of paid holidays in 1936 and the opening of Disneyland Paris in 1992 are prominent (Seraphin, 2012). As for tourism being viewed as an emerging field of study, the first course in tourism was offered by the *Paris School of Tourism and Communication*, a private institution, with the first public sector course launched in 1944.

A review of the literature reveals that hospitality courses however preceded the study of tourism. *Cours hotelier de Besancon* offered the first course in 1916 while *École Hôtelière de Paris* opened in 1932 (Seraphin, 2012). Higher Education institutions started to offer tourism and hospitality courses many years later with *Université Paris 1* being the first in 1961 to offer programmes in tourism and hospitality (Seraphin, 2012). The *University of Angers* opened its Tourism and Hospitality Department (*Etudes Supérieures de Tourisme et d’*

Hotellerie Université Angers) in 1982 with it now reported to be the largest of its kind in France. It is also the largest in Europe in terms of registered students (>3000), with 25% of its students originating from 43 different countries. At the same time, France also started attracting highly skilled workers in the hospitality and tourism sector. A survey, based on a sample of 3116 students studying in one of the Vatel Hotel and Tourism Business School in the world (Europe, Asia, Africa, Russia, Western Europe, Americas, and Middle East), revealed that 27% of the respondents are thinking of starting their career in France. This puts France just behind the USA (36%) but ahead of the following countries; Australia and Canada (19%), UK (13%); Switzerland (10%) and China (7%) (Opinion Way, 2019). In the particular case of France, the brain “drain” seems to be balanced with the brain “gain”.

Guironnet and Peypoch (2007: 399) defined the phenomenon of over-education as “employees whose level of qualification exceeds that required for the job they do”. This discrepancy is generally less marked for intermediate and higher occupations, with it being far more prominent in the case of lesser-skilled jobs (Guironnet & Peypoch, 2007). Jaoul-Grammare and Guironnet (2009) also highlighted, however, that over-education has a positive effect on the wages of over-educated workers with over-education being a rentable investment.

The above view was supported by Ortiz (2010) who compared the phenomenon of over-education in France with that of Italy and Spain. Franck,

Guironnet and Own (2013), meanwhile, found that over-education has created a discrepancy between two regions: those attractive for skilled workers with the creation of so-called brain “gain”, and those referred to as brain “drain” regions. In the particular context of France, over-education is triggered by an extension of compulsory education, the diversification of training provision, and the reduction in selectivity (Guironnet & Peypoch, 2007).

This conceptual study, therefore, focuses on Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), and more specifically on the relationship between the education system and employment, with particular scrutiny on tourism and courses taught in the field. By focusing on over-education, this study is arguing that Quality Education (SDG 4), should not be just about increasing access to education and school enrolment rates at all levels, particularly for girls (UN Education [Online]), but also on the relationship between education and employment.

2. Literature review

2.1. Over-education

The level of education of individuals in Western and industrialised countries has increased over the years, due to an increase in demand for higher-educated workers (Buchel, 2002; Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000). However, the pace in the supply of higher-skilled workers has outpaced their demand, leading

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3 to the reported phenomenon of over-education (Groot & Maassen van den Brink,
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6 2000). This occurs when an individual is more educated than is required to
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8 perform a given job (Rubb, 2003).
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11 The above definition is now a consensus in the academic community. For
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13 example, Mehta et al. (2011: 1334) state that a ‘worker is said to be overeducated
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15 if he/she has acquired more education than is required to perform his/her job’.
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17 For Alpin, Shackleton & Walsh (1998: 17), over-education represents the ‘the
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19 underutilisation of the skills of employed graduates’. Mehta et al. (2011).
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21 Meanwhile, add the dimensions of ‘return to education’ and ‘technological
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23 change’ as parameters. They argue that: ‘overeducation is confirmed if we
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25 observe that education levels rose in jobs that offer very low returns to education
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27 and the underwent little technological change’ (2011: 1134). Alpin et al. (1998)
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29 also added the dimension of market absorption, by arguing that when the level of
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31 qualifications run ahead of the economy’s ability to absorb these highly qualified
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33 workers, it leads to over-education. Kucel (2011) added the dimension of time to
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35 the definition by arguing that an individual might be over-educated for a job, and
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37 then get another one and be in job-match position. Kucel (2011) also finds that
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39 the agreed definition is misleading as it suggests that workers’ mistakenly
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41 acquired too much education. Linguistically speaking, it is worth mentioning that
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43 ‘over-education’, ‘occupational mismatch’, and ‘over-training’ can be
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45 indifferently used as they are synonymous (Halaby, 1994).
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Many individuals can sometimes choose to remain and as a result are likely to be underpaid (Rubb, 2003). When there is a perfect match between the level of education of an individual and his or her level of employment, the phenomenon is referred to as 'job match' or 'just-educated' (Rubb, 2003). Under-education happens 'where people hold graduate level jobs without possessing degrees' (Alpin et al., 1998: 17). In general, extensive experience can compensate for a lack of formal qualification (Alpin et al., 1998). Other reasons for over-education include the lack of professional experience, individuals using over-education to compensate their lack of professional experience, or individuals taking a career break or a break for career mobility. In this instance, Rubb (2003) explains that over-education could be a temporary phenomenon, as individuals are using those temporary forms of employment as stepping stones so as to get more experience before advancing to a more suitable position (Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000). If it appears that there are some (valid) justifications behind the phenomenon of over-education, Mehta et al. (2011) perceive it as resources being wasted. Alpin et al. (1998) disagree with this viewpoint due to the existence of the phenomenon of under-education, and also because they consider over-education as a temporary disequilibrium; as do Kucel (2011) and Ortiz (2010: 49). For the latter, over-education is viewed as a 'negligible phenomenon, which is naturally corrected by the market'. Equally interesting, for Bailey (1991), the focus of education systems should be more on the content of education, instead of the amount of education.

It is also worth highlighting two findings. First, it is reported that females are more concerned by the phenomenon of over-education than males (Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2000). Second, there is no significant differences in terms of job satisfaction between over-qualified or over-educated employees and those with a job match, hence the reason why employers are motivated to recruit over- educated collaborators (Buchel, 2002; Ortiz, 2010).

2.2. *Education in tourism*

‘Overeducation’ (also written as ‘over-education’) is not a well-researched area in tourism and hospitality. A review of the Association of Business School (ABS) list of journals in tourism and hospitality journals reveals only one journal article with the word ‘overeducation’ or ‘over-education’ in the title or keywords. Kokko and Guerrier (1994) defined ‘overeducation’ as a mismatch between employee’s level of education and job requirements. More specifically, they explained that this phenomenon happens when employees are over-educated for the jobs they do. Marchante et al. (2007) used the term ‘educational mismatch’ instead of ‘overeducation’. Indeed, they explained that ‘the educational mismatch is measured by comparing the worker’s maximum level of attained education and the educational level needed to perform his or her job’ (Marchante, Ortega and Pagan, 2007: 299). Furthermore, Kokko and Guerrier (1994) added another layer to the definition of ‘overeducation’ by highlighting the fact that ‘overeducation’ or ‘over-education’ occurs when the number of qualified people far exceed the

number of available jobs. This occurs when educational institutions produce more qualified workforce than that demanded from industry.

The above argument is also supported by Alpin et al. (1998) without any reference to subject or industry in particular. This was also supported by Chevalier (2003) who pointed out that research on over-education actually started in the 1970s in the USA due to a surge in the number of graduates that the market could not absorb. There are, therefore, two perspectives to over-education in tourism and hospitality. The present study is investigating ‘over-education’ from the latter perspective, namely when educational institutions produce more workforce than that demanded from industry.

According to Barone and Ortiz (2011), vocational students are more exposed to over-education. As for Jaoul-Grammare and Guironnet (2009), they argued that over-education is a phenomenon in France. As tourism as a vocational subject is widely taught in France, over-education might also be an issue in this field of study.

2.3. Background to the tourism industry's workforce

Tourism and hospitality sectors are important sources of employment. Worldwide, they account for 8.7% of world employment (Nickson, 2013). Staff working in hospitality and tourism come from different backgrounds. According to Boella and Goss-Turner (2020: 291), “the hospitality and tourism industry

sectors have topped the league table of labour turnover''. This translates practically into a lack of workforce stability and a challenge for employers to retain skilled employees (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2020; Nickson, 2013).

As a result, organisations in hospitality and tourism have to recruit students and / or international workers who contribute even more to employee turnover (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2020; Martin & McCabe, 2007). However, this turnover could be perceived positively if employees are leaving the organisation to pursue career development elsewhere albeit within the same sector. Turnover is only negative when employees leave their current job out of dissatisfaction and decide to leave the sector (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2020; Nickson, 2013;). However, it is important to note that the reasons for this high turnover (poor pay, poor working conditions, long hours, ineffective training, lack of promotional opportunities, job-related stress etc.) are mainly attributed to unskilled workers in the industry. Skilled workers leave organisations but tend to remain within the industry. In general, they leave for planned and strategic reasons such as promotion or for gaining further experience in what they consider to be better workplace environments (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2020; Nickson, 2013).

In tourism and hospitality, it seems that over-education can be explained by the fact that workers avoid unemployment (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2020; Rubb, 2003). This might explain why part of the workforce is underpaid (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2020; Nickson, 2013; Rubb, 2003) and is not always found to be

dedicated to the sector. In this instance, they fall under the category of permanent over-education and negative turnover. However, over-education can also be a temporary phenomenon as skilled workers are moving around in the industry seeking promotion, experience and skills development (Alpin et al, 1998; Boella & Goss-Turner, 2020; Kucel, 2011; Rubb, 2003). Such workers fall under the category of temporary over-education and positive turnover. The combination of permanent over-education and negative turnover, but also of temporary over-education and positive turnover, highlights the ambidextrous nature of the tourism and hospitality sectors (Vo Thanh, Seraphin, Okumus & Koseoglus, 2020).

3. Discussions

3.1. Exceeded capacity in tourism: presentation, outcomes and perspectives

The phenomenon and even trend of exceeding capacity in tourism appeared over the past four decades with the growth of the industry (Milano, Novelli & Cheer, 2019), followed naturally with a growth in education provision (Seraphin, 2012). This growth has led to a fragmentation and conflicts among stakeholders, due to the fact that the needs of some were met at the expense of others (Milano et al., 2019; Smith, Sziva & Olt, 2019). In the tourism context, when capacity is exceeded (in the case of this study, the ability of the market to absorb qualified labour force in tourism and cognate sectors), resilience is what enables existing

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3 systems to maintain themselves. Resilience enables these systems to mediate a
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5 balance between diverging interests (in the case of this study, training and
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7 employment), and to respond to them. This resilience can be of different types. It
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9 can be engineered, meaning that after the shock systems return to their original
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11 condition. It can also be ecological, meaning that systems adapt themselves to the
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13 new context. Finally, the resilience can change into a different stable state (Cheer,
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15 Milano & Novelli, 2019).
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23 In existing (education) systems, over-education could be referred to as a
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25 generator of engineering resilience when it appears as a temporary disequilibrium
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27 (Alpin et al., 1998; Kucel, 2011; Ortiz, 2010). Over-education could also be seen
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29 to trigger ecological resilience because individuals choose to either stay and
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31 progress within an economic sector whereas others decide to move to other
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33 sectors (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2020; Nickson, 2013).
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40 The exceeded capacity in tourism requires the intervention of policy
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42 makers (Cheer et al., 2019) at governmental and inter-governmental levels
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44 (Milano et al., 2019). This means policies should be re-examined (Mehta et al.,
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46 2011) in order to end a *laissez faire* and status quo approach. This study also
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48 suggests that governmental actions should be followed by the adoption of an
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50 ambidextrous management approach. Such an approach should combine not only
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52 the interests of all stakeholders in the industry but also seek to mitigate the
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54 negative impacts of some initiatives (Milano et al., 2019; Seraphin, Sheeran &
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Pilato, 2019). This view is supported by Panayiotopoulos and Pisano (2019) who suggest that a strategy to overcome exceeded capacity situations sometimes requires finding a balance between opposites. Overall, as Tribe (2000) and Tribe and Liburd (2016) argue, there is therefore a need to discipline the indiscipline of tourism as a field of study (non-business aspect) and industry (business aspect). This discipline could happen with the adoption of a less ethnocentric, more equitable, and more generous world, which practically, would happen with establishing a strong relationship between students, educators, society, sustainability and morality (Young, Witsel & Boyle, 2017). This approach is therefore calling for the application of the Helix model.

The Helix model calls for collaboration between stakeholders, which subsequently leads to success as partners involved share resources and similar vision and objectives (Carlisle, Kunc, Jones & Tiffin, 2013). In the context of this study, stakeholders are students, tourism organisations and tourism course providers. It is extremely important that all stakeholders involved in the tourism industry, namely education providers, employers and students (Ali et al., 2017; Tesone & Ricci, 2005) work together as 'France has some difficulties to adapt its higher educational system to the economic system' (Jaoul-Grammare & Guironnet, 2009: 6). The same issue has also been highlighted regarding tourism education and the tourism industry in France (Seraphin, 2012). To avoid over-education in tourism in France, it is important that students are given a very

specific and realistic picture of roles in the industry and qualification needed. More opportunities for internships and practical training (Tesone & Ricci, 2005) should also be provided, hence the importance of the application of the Triple Helix Model to tourism education.

Depending on the case in question, a type of Helix model is suggested. Sometimes, the collaboration between three tourism stakeholders are suggested, hence the application of the Triple Helix model (Carlisle, 2013). Sometimes, it is suggested that more stakeholders get involved. Calzada (2016) suggested the collaboration of five of them as a strategy to overcome tourism phobia. To achieve a discipline of tourism, this study suggests including additional stakeholders consistent with that advocated by Young et al. (2017), whereby the extra stakeholder is the individual businesses within tourism.

3.2. Education and destination performance

One of factors that can have a positive influence in over-education in tourism is the existence of a pool of graduates who contribute to the performance of the destination. Indeed, it has already been proven that there is a clear connection between an organisation's performance and staff levels of qualifications (Lee & Hallack, 2018). This view is further supported by De Silva (1997) who argues that a good education system is the seed of economic development. It is the pace at which education and training systems transmit knowledge and skills to learners

that would determine the pace of development of the country. In this line of thought, De Silva (1997) pointed out the importance of a close collaboration between (confederations of) employers and education providers for this pace and quality of knowledge and skills transmission to happen. According to De Silva (1997: 15), 'without the right kind of human capital other policies (economic, trade and investment policies) will fail to deliver growth'. De Silva's (1997) view is supported by Johnson (2011), who added that a well-educated workforce helps organisations to adapt with changes, and equally important to empower the labour force.

Adopting an inductive approach based on the aforementioned literature review, it could therefore be argued that the more staff are qualified, the better the organisation or destination marketing organisations they work for are going to perform. In the same line of thought, it could be argued that the good performance of France as the leading destination in the world (Seraphin, 2012) could be partly due to the fact that over-education in tourism is a feature of the French education system. This is further supported by the fact that destination successes are strongly dependent on their resources endowment or on effective deployment of resources (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). As a result of this fact, Botti, Goncalves and Ratsimbanierana (2011) suggest that in this context of hard competition between destinations, particular efforts are put on deployment of resources. The reason is that they are significant determinant of destination

success. Education falls under the category of resource deployment (De Silva, 1997; Johnson, 2011).

That said, ‘high levels of education do not by themselves guarantee economic development’ (De Silva, 1997). It is also worth highlighting the limitation for a destination to have a well-trained workforce. Indeed, highly qualified graduates are also likely to be paid more than others. They are also likely to be more flexible in switching jobs than others (Franck et al., 2013), which can lead to a brain drain. This is all the more the case in emerging destinations (Mintocoy & Seraphin, 2017). However, industrialised and developed countries such as France are also victims of “brain drain”, which is found to be expensive for the French government as the country experiences a reduction in terms of return on investment (Guironnet & Peypoch, 2007).

4. Conclusion

Destination Marketing Organisations need to have a holistic vision of destination management. According to the research, destination management should consider both aspects of tourism (field of study and discipline) to avoid any form of discrepancy at a macro or a micro level or at discipline or industry level, and equally important ensure a synergy between tourism education and tourism industry as advocated by the Helix model. This study has thus served to provide

evidence that tourism education is an important element to take into consideration when discussing or strategizing the improvement of the performance of a destination. This is all the more important for emerging destinations which need to invest in their tourism education systems alongside the industry. As for the leading destinations in the world, such as France, education can clearly be seen to be one of those primary factors that contributes to the competitive advantage and overall resilience of the destination.

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